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Rashi, Tsurie; McCombs, Maxwell

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Biblical antecedents of modern Agenda-Setting: religious platforms in lieu of mass media

Dr. Tsuriel RASHI
School of Communication
Bar-Ilan University
52900 Ramat Gan
ISRAEL
tsuriel.rashi@gmail.com

Professor Maxwell McCOMBS
School of Journalism
University of Texas at Austin
USA
maxwell.mcombs@sbcglobal.net

Abstract: Can a primitive society set a public agenda? Are there some advantages for a religious society in setting an agenda? From a critical study of the communicative perspective of the Bible and hermeneutic reading of its texts, it can be said that certain elements in primitive societies succeeded in influencing the political and social agendas. They did so by exploiting specific public assemblies or appearing in crowded places in attempts to impact local and national agendas. This notion is significant because it suggests that in countries that do not have developed communication infrastructures or established religious institutions (e.g., churches, mosques, and synagogues) that serve as public arenas, indeed even in seemingly closed religious communities, there may well be attempts to use venues other than mass media to influence the public agenda.

Keywords: agenda setting, religion, Bible, New Testament

*Précédents bibliques à l'agenda setting :
les plateformes religieuses comme passerelles médiatiques*

Résumé : Bien que la notion d'agenda setting n'a émergé dans l'analyse des politiques publiques qu'au début des années '70, une lecture de la Bible dans une approche herméneutique critique dévoile le fait que déjà dans l'antiquité biblique il était possible d'influencer les programmes politiques et sociaux, grâce à l'exploitation d'assemblées publiques d'ordre religieux, comme plateformes médiatiques. Cette thèse est pertinente car elle affirmerait que bien avant le développement des infrastructures modernes de communication, les différentes manifestations religieuses servaient de facto comme tribunes publiques et passerelles médiatiques en plus de leur rôle cultuel de jure.

Mots-clés : agenda setting, religion, Bible, Nouveau Testament

1. Agenda-Setting theory

Following upon the groundbreaking article by McCombs and Shaw (1972), Agenda-Setting Theory became recognized as one of the most prominent and fruitful hypotheses in communications research, even to the extent that it is claimed to have reached the status of a paradigm (Dearing and Rogers, 1996). Although most agenda setting research from Chapel Hill to the present day has investigated public issues, political candidates, and other aspects of public affairs, agenda setting theory is applicable to a much wider field (Kosicki, 1993). A major trend in contemporary research is expansion into new settings that range from corporate reputations, professional sports, and classroom teaching to religion (McCombs, 2004). Application of agenda setting theory in a range of areas is possible owing to its core concepts and the transmission of salience from one agenda to another. The focus of much research on mass media and the public represents a particular set of operational definitions of the core concept. In the research presented in this paper, the operational definitions are in terms of biblical events.

The ancient world did not possess the technological means for "mass media," although it did have several point-to-point communication technologies, such as torches, acoustic signaling, hydraulic telegraphs, reflected sunlight via mirrors, data encryption, etc. (Lahanas, n.d.). Nevertheless, all big societies have a need to disseminate public communication. Thus, it is hardly surprising to find ancient regimes in general and Jewish polities specifically devising social frameworks for such communication, whether for purely religious ends or even for the pursuit of general social purposes.

In its most researched application, Agenda-Setting Theory examines the correlation between the *news media agenda*, that is, the prominence of issues that are under discussion in the media and the *public agenda*, that is, the issues that the public

perceives as being of paramount importance at any particular point in time (McCombs, 2004). According to the proponents of the theory, this correlation helps to show, in Cohen's oft-quoted statement, that the media "most of the time does not succeed in telling its readers what to think, but it succeeds admirably in telling them what to think *about*" (Cohen, 1963: 13).

Nevertheless, throughout history societies all over the globe have shaped their public agendas and bridged the gaps of time and space without sophisticated media. How did they get their members to initiate actions as well as processes? What might that tell us about contemporary societies that are shaping agendas that may in the end influence other societies?

According to Innis the concepts of time and space reflect the significance of media to civilization. Media that emphasize time are those that are durable in character such as parchment, clay, and stone. The heavy materials are suited to the development of architecture and sculpture. Media that emphasize space are apt to be less durable and light in character such as papyrus and paper. The latter are suited to wide areas in administration and trade. The conquest of Egypt by Rome gave access to supplies of papyrus, which became the basis of a large administrative empire. Materials that emphasize time favor decentralization and hierarchical types of institutions, whereas those that emphasize space favor centralization and systems of government less hierarchical in character (Innis, 1950: 7). But how did it work in societies that were dependent solely on time-biased media and were oral and tribal?

The Gutenberg Galaxy, McLuhan's pioneering and monumental contribution to the study of oral and print cultures and media ecology throughout history, describes how communication technology (alphabetic writing, the printing press, and the electronic media) affected cognitive organization, which in turn had profound ramifications for social organization (McLuhan 1962).

McLuhan's episodic history takes the reader from pre-alphabetic tribal human-kind to the electronic age. A more recent work (McLuhan, Fiore, and Agel 1996) defines the tribal age as a time of community in which the ear was the dominant sense organ. They contend that during the tribal age, hearing was the most valuable sense because it allowed one to be more immediately aware of one's surroundings, which was very important for hunters. During the tribal age, hearing was believing – and our focus here is on the biblical period. A critical study of the communicative perspective in the Bible, which describes events of the tribal age, and hermeneutic reading of its texts may help to pave the way toward a new understanding of how agendas were shaped in primitive societies.

The importance of this paper lies in the fact that it draws a connection between the agenda setting question and the media issue with which we are dealing: How did individuals manage to set an agenda in the tribal age? If the term "media ecology" can be defined as the study of media environments, the idea that technology and techniques, modes of information, and codes of communication play leading roles in human affairs (Strate, 1999), we want to analyze biblical media ecology. It also adds

to our understanding of the relationship between media or public communication and content (agenda in this case) among Third World societies that are virtually still in the tribal age or in a case where mass communication as we know it in the beginning of the twenty-first century collapses owing to a natural disaster or a revolution, which would lead to silencing of media across the country.

2. Methodology and methodological challenges

Is it possible to study historical phenomena using contemporary concepts? As McLuhan noted (1962, 1996) and as many other scholars from the media ecology school of thought have suggested, communication is basic to human behavior. Moreover, they contend that consciousness research has demonstrated that people in different societies, with different modes of interpersonal relationships have basically the same consciousness structure, which is inherent among human beings (Malul, 2002: 64–70). If a new technology extends one or more of our senses outside us into the social world, then new ratios among all of our senses will occur in that particular culture. It is comparable to what happens when a new note is added to a melody. When the sense ratios alter in any culture then what had appeared lucid before may suddenly become opaque and what had been vague or opaque may become translucent (McLuhan, 1962: 41).

One who wishes to explore any particular human society must first understand that society's internal logic and thought processes, which are an outgrowth of its way of life, and then use investigative concepts to observe it from without. These two aspects are not contradictory, but rather complementary to one another. Today's researcher tries to uncover and understand an earlier culture and the civilization that embraced it using modern methods and tools (Davis, 1991: 67–70; Knauf, 1991: 172)

Biblical historiography was compiled by authors who were removed from the events they wrote about in both time and place. Their writing was tendentious and they shaped their work according to the mores of the time and the perceptions of their own leaders. Thus those works do not have the status of a source. Such records of events, beliefs, and customs may reflect the thoughts, creativity, and imagination of the writers and reveal not the true historical "reality," but rather history as it was understood and shaped by those who wrote about it.

Biblical historiography reflects the conceptual world of its authors as well as the intellectual negotiation of its time and point of view. Among other things, this tradition reflects a religious and social reality, the media process, daily life, beliefs, opinions, and customs of the time. Thus, even when descriptions of events recorded in the Bible are not really historically accurate, they probably reflect the authors' daily life and the then contemporary processes of communication. One can contend, then, that the text is a reasonable reflection of the historic reality, so it does not really matter if the biblical story of the event is historically accurate.

More important than historical accuracy are the background and the general lines of the event, that is, the time and place and the social-historical-religious circumstances that were part of any spiritual creation. Through their texts biblical authors shared a message with a specific audience, an audience of intellectual elite, individuals who were knowledgeable regarding the accepted concepts of their time. It was impossible to present them with descriptions and background that were contrary to what they already knew. Even if the descriptions of events are not reliable according to modern criteria, they were reliable in the eyes of that contemporary audience. An examination of the biblical text is the starting point for the contemporary approach regarding ambience, behavior patterns, and modes of thought. What is significant for us today is the authenticity of the details in biblical descriptions.

The present study is unique in that it combines two fields of research – Biblical Historiography and Media Research – to delineate the way a public agenda was established in a primitive society. Clearly, McCombs and Shaw's theoretical analysis only makes sense in a mediated world, a modern world where scholars began to wonder if publishers, editors, and writers might have tremendous power and where investigating the extent of that power seemed worthwhile. However, their "agenda setting" is relevant even in a period when there was no "mass media." Noah, Moses, Elijah, and Paul did not deal with a system in which the audience they wanted to sway could only be reached "through the mass media."

The focus here is "agenda setting" but not in the specific sense in which McCombs and Shaw originally used the term. To fully understand the scope of agenda setting theory, it is useful to distinguish between the various *concepts*, *domains*, and *settings* that define the theory and its hundreds of empirical applications. The core *concepts* of agenda setting theory are *a pair of agendas* and the *transfer of salience* between these agendas. Or put another way, agenda setting is about the communication of ideas from a source (or group of sources) to a large public.

These theoretical concepts can be studied in many different domains and settings. Beginning with the Chapel Hill study and continuing to this day, the dominant domain of agenda setting is public affairs, particularly public issues. A very different domain with a significant literature developed in recent decades is corporate reputations. Other contemporary domains touched on in recent scholarship include professional sports, national images, and several aspects of culture. Yet another emerging domain, religion, shifts the focus of agenda setting research far beyond its original and continuing emphasis on the mass media of communication.

Within these diverse domains, agenda setting can be studied in a vast array of settings. That is to say, *the operational definitions of the core concepts of agenda setting theory can be particular aspects of many different domains*. Each of these domains can be studied in many geographic settings across time. In the traditional domain of public affairs – indeed, in most of these domains – the most studied setting is the media agenda–public agenda dyad. But that is no more than a popular operational definition of the concept with its origin in the Chapel Hill study. Also

found among the many different settings in the research literature are the links among the various media of communication themselves, links between sources and the news media, and the influence of public speeches and personal conversations on the public agenda. Other aspects of these domains include the kinds of agenda items studied, which are by no means limited to public issues. A considerable array of topics and ideas has been the focus of agenda setting studies. In sum, the application of agenda setting theory to examine a variety of domains has taken place in a wide range of geographic settings worldwide at many historic points in time.

Whereas the concept of an “agenda” and having power over that agenda can certainly be applied in areas where there are no communication media or where such media hold little sway, in such an instance we have to focus on the connections among individuals who tried to influence a crowd to act or to believe in a particular way. Of course, when we talk about communication in biblical terms we mean the dynamic of an individual or a small group delivering a message to the masses using specific methods, and when we discuss the setting we are usually referring to the people that gathered in a particular place at a particular time to hear what was being said.

Although the various biblical events and religious settings discussed here could be treated as a set of discrete and singular happenings, the application of agenda setting theory aligns them in terms of a basic communication process and gives them meaning beyond the particulars of each individual happening. This linking of happenings in terms of a common thread is, of course, the function of theory. In other words, a comprehensive theory provides an intellectual map or overview of otherwise discrete elements.

3. The temple as the public communications center

During biblical times, tens of thousands of Jews in the Land of Israel (Alon, 1957: 77) as well as some from the Diaspora (Safrai, 1985) made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the Temple Mount three times a year (Feast of Tabernacles, Passover, and Pentecost). Although it is obviously somewhat of an exaggeration, Josephus Flavius once made a detailed count of the number of Jews around the Temple Mount during a Passover celebration and came up with the enormous number of 2,700,000 Jews! Even if the true number was only a tenth of this, it would still be a huge mass meeting (Flavius, 1961: 499). The prophets exploited this mass assembly to good effect, as can be seen from Jeremiah’s declaration, which was in reality a protest that was representative of the ideas of many of the other prophets (Weber, 1979):

Thus says the Lord: Stand in the court of the Lord’s house and speak to all the cities of Judah which come worship in the House of the Lord all the words that I command you to speak to them; do not hold back a word. It may be they will listen and every one turns from his evil way. (Jeremiah 26, 2–3)

God's messages were transmitted through the prophet, who was a spokesman 'selling' God's Word. Yet the prophet was more than a messenger; he had a special standing in the presence of God (Jer. 15:19). The prophet's words were unbiased but stressed monotheism or a religion of morality, raising the spiritual standards and strengthening the moral fiber (Cohen, 2012). From the Establishment's standpoint, two central goals characterized public communication in the Jewish world: providing religiously related information to the public and supporting the political and/or religious leadership's policies. On the other hand, non- (or anti-) Establishment public communication was the obverse side of the same coin: decrying leadership policies that deviated from accepted theology-based practice. It should be noted that the word "religious" is somewhat misleading to the modern Western mind, because in pre-modern, traditional Judaism it did not mean a specific, compartmentalized area of life, but rather the underlying legal-normative system for all areas of one's life – what later came to be called "Halakha," literally: "walk" (of life).

On the political side, the ancient Jewish regime was not a pure autocracy, but rather was marked to some extent by duality. During the biblical period, within the formal Jewish monarchy there were seminal signs of the modern "separation of powers," that is, limited authority was a relatively consistent theme in the Jewish constitutional polity (Elazar & Cohen, 2005). For example, the king needed the Great Court's approval to go to war; the prophet would publicly and vociferously criticize the king or society at large for their immoral behavior (more on this below). On the other hand, over the generations there evolved a general expectation that routine public communication should serve to strengthen the system's status quo, inculcate the necessary Jewish values and societal norms, and promulgate Jewish law, that is the halakhic decisions of the rabbinic authorities. Thus, two countervailing forces and trends coexisted within the same society and polity: reducing the authoritarianism of the polity by increasing the scope and freedom of public communication and reinforcing normative behavior through efficient use of public communication channels.

Even in ordinary times the Temple Mount was a magnet for large numbers of Jews and non-Jews who wanted (or were required) to bring a personal sacrifice, as written in Acts 2, 5–11:

And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven...Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.

This explains why the prophets and apostles focused on this site to promulgate edicts, disseminate information, and educate the masses when possible during the major holidays. , but when they could not wait, they came even on ordinary days when there was a large audience at the Temple.

4. Communication in the community: the synagogue as a mini-temple

Synagogues, which began to appear after the Babylonian exile following the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BCE, were established out of the fear of the leaders of the people that without the Temple, the nation would forget its Judaism. Several of these synagogues, both in the Land of Israel and in the Diaspora, continued to function in tandem with the Second Temple and served as foci for local assemblies.¹

Once the Second Temple was destroyed, local synagogues (literally: meeting places) became places not only for religious worship but also for public communication. One example of the latter role can be seen in the following quote concerning the return of lost articles:

There was a “Claimants” Stone’ in Jerusalem. Anyone who lost something would turn there and anyone who found a lost object would turn there. The finder would stand and announce and the owner would stand and give identifying marks and take it...When the Temple was destroyed... the sages declared that they should announce [lost objects] in the synagogues and study halls. (Talmud, Tractate *Baba Metzia*, p. 28b)²

This paragraph shows how local communities analyzed the communicative aspect of the Temple and adapted the national exposure in the religious arena to a local venue. The people understood that apart from the importance of location, the timing of the exposure was also significant.

5. Timing as a major factor in setting the agenda

Apart from the location, which was a factor in the degree of exposure, as was the case in connection with the Temple, at the national or global level, or the synagogue, at the communal level, timing was an important component in any attempt to influence the public agenda. The three pilgrim festivals, for instance, were superb opportunities to take control or have issues placed on the public agenda: “Now about

¹ Even though the synagogue has been central to Jewish identity for many generations, very few comprehensive studies have been done on the subject. The first was a study by Elbogen (1971), which appears in his book about the history of prayer in Israel. Another comprehensive work is that of Krauss (1922), which deals with the synagogue in ancient times, among other things.

It is worth mentioning Levine’s book, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (2000), which deals with the history of the synagogue until the end of ancient times. “The Thousand Years” that are mentioned in the title begin from the third century B.C.E. with evidence from several Egyptian inscriptions until the Arab conquest of the land of Israel in 638 A.D. The book by Runesson, Binder, and Olsson, 2008, should also be mentioned since it covers the ancient period extensively.

² For more information about the direct connection between the synagogue and influence on the agenda, see: Hellinger and Rashi, 2009.

the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the Temple and taught” (John 7, 14)³. In the same way, the weekly Sabbath was a wonderful opportunity to gain exposure, as Paul did on different occasions:

Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem. But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and sat down. And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on (Acts 13, 13–15).⁴

It can be concluded that the right combination of a central religious place and specific assembly dates that are known to potential audiences as well the leaders in advance may result in increased exposure and public awareness, which might well influence local and national agendas. A combination of the two factors – the right place, the synagogue, and exact timing of the people’s assembly on the Sabbath – is found in Luke:

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up for to read...And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the ... synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them: “This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears.” And all bore him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said: “Is not this Joseph’s son?” And he said unto them; “Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country.” And he said, “Verily I say unto you, no prophet is accepted in his own country”... And all in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath...And He came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and taught them on the Sabbath days (Luke 4, 16–32).

If we examine the biblical text more closely, we can find failed attempts, for example, when Noah was building the ark, and public confrontations, such as the civil war that began by influencing the agenda in the most unusual way with the

³ Another example is found a few verses later: In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink (John 7, 37).

⁴ A similar combination of religious arena and religious timing can be found in the story of the messengers, Ch. 17:

Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. (Acts 17, 1–3).

And in Ch. 19: “And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God” (Acts 19, 8).

story of the butchering of the concubine on the hill, as described in Judges 19–21, which we discuss at length below. Often the midrashic literature, the homiletic method of biblical exegesis, helps expand the picture drawn so succinctly in the biblical text.

6. Attempts to influence the agenda during biblical times

This is the way, for example, that Noah attempted to use the building of the ark to arouse curiosity and to make the members of his generation return to the faith before God inundated the world with floodwaters.

According to the Midrash (homiletic teachings on the Bible), it took Noah 120 years to build the ark in order to give the people time to ask him what he was doing and why he was doing it (Midrash Rabah Genesis 30, 7). But in the end, it can be said that he failed. Noah tried but did not succeed in influencing the public agenda.

Perhaps Noah's failure can be explained by the fact that the "spiral of silence" that encourages sinners and sins has already been so deeply rooted among most people that it was impossible to change and influence the agenda.

It is possible that the lesson to be learned from this is that anyone who wants to influence the agenda must do so when there is no clear position in the public sphere in relation to a specific issue or there is a public debate as to the proper way to deal with a subject on the agenda.

When the effort comes too late, there is no choice but to give up as did Noah and his family. It is written in Genesis 7: 6: "And Noah was six hundred years old when the flood of waters was upon the earth." Noah and his family survived the great flood but the rest of the human race, who had ignored the warning and failed to include Noah when they shaped the public agenda, perished.

The Book of Samuel (1 Sam. 1:3) implies an attempt to influence that generation and reawaken public awareness as to the importance of the pilgrim festivals. The book begins with the story of Elkanah, the son of Jeroham, who was the father of Samuel: "And this man went up out of his city from year to year to worship and to sacrifice unto the LORD of hosts in Shiloh." The Midrash, which questions the necessity for all of the details related to Elkanah's pilgrimage, describes how he made a pilgrimage to Shiloh and deliberately slept in the streets of the cities on his way: "And there was an excitement in the city, and people approached and asked: 'what is your destination' and he answered them: 'the house of the LORD in Shiloh'" (Tana Debey Eliyahu 8, 4). Unlike Noah, who failed in the end, Elkanah succeeded after a long while and a Sisyphean repetition of his activities.

Moses, on the other hand, had no desire to influence the masses, but rather he challenged the leadership, particularly Pharaoh, the supreme, undisputed leader of ancient Egypt. The first time Moses asked Pharaoh to release the people of Israel from bondage he tried to take advantage of timing to influence the outcome. He went to Pharaoh and demanded freedom, as is related in Exodus 5:1: "And afterward Moses and Aaron came, and said unto Pharaoh: 'Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel: Let My people go, that they may hold a feast unto Me in the wilderness.'"

The timing was unique, very carefully chosen – it was a time when many leaders of the ancient world were present because, according to the Midrash, it was Pharaoh's birthday (Midrash Rabah Exodus 5, 18).

As noted above, sometimes there is no need to choose a specific occasion to influence the agenda, but rather one must find the most appropriate place to reach the greatest number of listeners in the shortest possible time. Jesus tried to influence his audience through his activities in the public area close to the Temple. We do not know whether he succeeded, but his attempts are described in the Gospel according to Matthew:

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?" The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee." Jesus entered the Temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. "It is written," he said to them, "My house will be called a house of prayer (Isaiah 56, 7) but you are making it a den of robbers." (Jer. 7: 11; Matt 21: 10–13)⁵

7. Biblical debates about agenda setting

Even if it seems as though the basis for shaping the agenda is present and all that remains is to choose the most convenient time and place to exploit it, in reality the picture is very different. There are many debates on this subject recorded in the Bible. Take, for example, the following passage in Numbers describing the spies' return from their journey in the new land and the ensuing disagreement between Caleb and the others:

And they went and came to Moses, and to Aaron, and to all the congregation of the children of Israel, unto the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh; and brought back word unto them, and unto all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land. And they told him, and said: "We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it. Howbeit the people that dwell in the land are fierce, and the cities are fortified, and very great; and moreover we saw the children of giants there. Amalek dwelleth in the land of the South; and the Hittite, and the Jebusite, and the Amorite dwell in the mountains; and the Canaanite dwelleth by the sea, and along by the side of the Jordan."

The spies deprecate the unknown land, but Caleb silences the angry crowd and attempts to take control of the new agenda:

And Caleb stilled the people toward Moses, and said: "We should go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it." But the men that went up with him said: "We are not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger

⁵ See also: Mark 11, 15–17; Luke 19, 45–46.

than we.” And they spread an evil report of the land that they had spied out unto the children of Israel, saying: “The land, through which we have passed to spy it out is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of great stature. And there we saw the Nephilim, the sons of Anak, who come of the Nephilim; and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.”(Num.13: 26–33)

This is a prime example of a debate concerning an agenda. In that case, the majority won.

In the same way, Moses struggled against strong opposition by attempting to bring questions regarding the legitimacy of his own leadership to the forefront of the public agenda when Korah, the son of Izhar, challenged him:

And they assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them: “Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them; wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?” (Num. 16: 3)

Korah and his followers eventually leave the temporary political stage, but they will be remembered for all time as opposition forces.

8. Proven successes in influencing the biblical agenda

Interestingly enough, there were quite a few successes in biblical times in influencing the agenda, even to the surprise of some of the protagonists who succeeded. There was even a civil war, which raged mainly because one individual decided to do something provocative that would bring the subject into the national consciousness – the story of the concubine on the hill in the Book of Judges (Chs. 19–21).

The story tells of a man from the tribe of Levi who, together with his concubine, somehow reached a city belonging to the tribe of Benjamin. While they were eating at the home of an elderly man who had agreed to host them, people of the town surrounded the house and demanded that the man be taken out so that they could torture him. The host pleaded with them not to harm his guest but to take his virgin daughter and the concubine in the man’s stead. Even though the crowd refused, the man forced his concubine to go outside, and she was raped and tortured by the townspeople all night. Just before dawn, they left her, and she lay, unconscious, in the doorway until morning. When the man arose that morning, he opened the door to leave and found her on the doorstep. When he saw that she had apparently died, he took the body home, cut it into twelve parts, and sent the parts around the country. The public reaction was: “And it was so, that all that saw it said: ‘Such a thing hath not happened nor been seen from the day that the children of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt unto this day; consider it, take counsel, and speak’” (Judg. 19, 30).

The stunned nation gathered as one unit in the city of Mizpeh in the tribal area of Benjamin, where they asked the people of the tribe to hand over the individuals who

had committed the atrocity, so that they could execute them. After they refused, the rest of the nation declared war on the tribe of Benjamin, whose members are described as men of valor, announcing that whoever did not go to war would be put to death, and took an oath not to allow their women to marry into the tribe of Benjamin. There were three battles, with Israel losing the first two in spite of its numerical superiority (400,000 fighters vs. 267,000), and it was only in the last battle that the nation smote nearly all of the tribe of Benjamin and razed its cities to the ground. Only 600 men of the tribe survived. The war (described in Judges, Ch. 20) was the result of the successful attempt by one man to shock the public and to influence the public and the national agendas.

In today's world, there is a connection between the religious terror organizations and the new media platforms in shaping national as well global agendas. Executions carried out by ISIS somewhere in a desolate wilderness in the Middle East in front of the camera and distributed on social networks often succeed in shaking world public opinion far more than a vague knowledge of the deaths of thousands in wars around the world.

Perhaps the precedent is the same story of the concubine, parts of which were scattered throughout the Kingdom of Israel and led to civil war.⁶

Many of the prophets went to the courtyard of the Temple Mount in order to reach as many listeners as they could. Daily they tried to place moral issues on the public agenda, as Weber (1979) claimed: God "hoped" that He would be able to change the agenda but He failed.

On very rare occasions, some of the prophets were able to create effective platforms and find the right timing to influence the agenda. Elijah attempted to bestir the nation to return to its faith and was prepared to go to war single-handedly against the majority, so he waged a public debate over every single issue.

The confrontation between the 450 prophets of Baal and the 50 prophets of the Asherah vs. Elijah on the Carmel mountain (Kings. 1: 18) was a brave attempt by one prophet to create a platform in a specific place and at a specific time to elucidate the difference between idol worship and belief in one God. Elijah was able to motivate the people and take control of the public discourse, whereupon they slew the prophets of Ba'al, thereby arousing Jezebel's anger and prompting King Ahab to hunt him down.

Success and influence also came from activities at different focal points on a local level rather than from one central place such as the Temple, for example, from synagogues, as was the case with Jesus, as is related in the Gospel according to Matthew:

And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with diverse diseases and tor-

⁶ For further details, see: Galloway, 2016.

ments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them. And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judaea, and from beyond Jordan (Matt 4, 23–25).⁷

Conclusions and summary

The field of communications theory is less than a century old, having first been posited in the 1920s (Lippman, 1922) and advancing rapidly from the 1940s onward (Lasswell, 1948; Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1948). However, versions of mass media have existed for several centuries and there has been public communication for millennia, both palpably important and influential.

In this article we have tried to trace the even more ancient biblical footsteps, not with the aim of seeking the historical roots of influence on the agenda (although there has been some reference to that issue), but to in order to look at descriptions of the influence on the agenda within societies that function without an advanced mass media or use a parallel infrastructure in order to build the public agenda as was done during biblical times.

What lessons should be learned by those undertaking agenda setting via more traditional religious frameworks? What is effective and what is not?

We may say that even in certain traditional societies there was an organized system of public communication on religious platforms – a communication that was carried on face to face, but was institutional in nature. Those religious platforms initiated as well as fueled public struggles and helped to promote issues to the public agenda. Individuals such as Jeremiah as well as Jesus, who knew how to time addresses to the masses as they gathered on particular occasions and were able to take over the agenda, were easily able to set that agenda in a primitive religious society.

Future research should be directed toward finding parallel ideas in ancient or religious texts and conducting a comparative study as to how religious platforms have been used for communicational activities.

Further work should also include studies to determine whether societies that preserve primitive social patterns attempt to shape their media, public, and political

⁷ Similar success stories are described in other places, such as in the Gospel, according to Mark:

And immediately his fame spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee...And he said unto them, Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth. And he preached in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and cast out devils...But he (the leper) went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places: and they came to him from every quarter (Mark 1:28–45).

And in the Gospel, according to Mark:

But Jesus withdrew himself with his disciples to the sea: and a great multitude from Galilee followed him, and from Judaea, And from Jerusalem, and from Idumaea, and from beyond Jordan; and they about Tyre and Sidon, a great multitude, when they had heard what great things he did, came unto him (Mark 3:7–8).

agendas through the exploitation of festive assemblies and sites of religious gatherings.

Similarly, we will learn whether a greater understanding of the means of influencing the agenda in primitive societies will improve the efforts of those who shape the public agenda using modern mass media. In biblical times events on religious platforms had a significant influence on religious and the national agendas.

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